

The Child, the Book and the Movie

THE third annual Children's Book Week begins appropriately enough on the birthday of Robert Louis Stevenson. That great lover of children and creator of such lasting classics as "Treasure Island" and "Prince Otto" would have regarded such an undertaking with sympathy and delight. Beginning tomorrow publishers, booksellers, libraries, women's clubs, schools, clubs and churches will emphasize their endeavors to place books of genuine merit in the hands of children. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, which is particularly interested in this movement, has prepared a series of suggestions for special club programs during the week and they include such ideas as the following eight: (1) Poems children love; (2) a Robert Louis Stevenson program; (3) children's books of an older generation; (4) the book beautiful—what has been done in the making of books for children; (5) a Louisa May Alcott program; (6) the books my children chose themselves; (7) how shall I choose my children's books; (8) the story hour, a pathway to the book. Here are eight pegs on which clubs may hang and originate extremely interesting programs.

Another thing to be emphasized during the week are motion pictures for children, and especially picturizations of such child-classics as "Treasure Island," "Huckleberry Finn," and kindred undertakings. There has been a deal of controversy regarding the value of motion pictures and how much or how little they have detracted from the child's desire to read. In the following columns will be found statements treating both sides of this controversy: a defense of pictures by Alexander Black, and the reverse side of the problem by William Heyliger. Montrose J. Moses has set forth the reasons for Children's Book Week and they follow this paragraph immediately. His reasons are such as to make it entirely obvious how important this nation-wide movement really is and how necessary it is that parents aid to the limit of their abilities in making the week successful.

WHY IS CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK?

The commendable nation-wide campaign for the spread of better reading among the children of the land is a concerted move which should be supported by every sane parent, furthered by every conscientious librarian and teacher, and hailed by the bookselling people for the simple reason that better books among the young means preparing future trade in better books for the old.

The necessity of a Children's Book Week is founded on all these negative forces which play against the free and best development of the individual child. Economic strain, social limitations, the wear and tear of speed on the nerves, are factors which have changed the parents' relation to the child, have necessitated the State (whose agents are the school and the library) taking hold of the mental training of the young, have set the boy and girl—scarcely out of swaddling clothes—in the midst of intricate problems of living.

What chance is there for a leisurely contact with good books, unless hours are consecrated to the task of wholesome enjoyment of the written word? You have the juvenile room in the Public Library and it hums with activity. Ragamuffins bend over highly colored picture books, so expensive that it makes one unhappy to witness the pages turned hastily by hands that are none too clean. Before the shelves are bright faces scanning titles, one wanting the eighth book in a "series" of twenty volumes, another in quest of high adventure. The libraries have done well in weeding the wheat from the

chaff. It is not likely that any child will come to harm from a book unwisely chosen, unless the librarian accepts a gift of books sent in by a well-meaning donor after house-cleaning.

Our school system makes little or no provision for a thorough contact with books through spontaneous enjoyment. If a good book is put upon the curriculum, it is studied to death, until the child hates the word "classic" and shudders at the word "style." Take the school reader and see what a conglomerate mess it is, whereas any good book could be made into a reader through the judicious handling of a wise teacher. Our school books have been written to short circuit any desire we may have for leisurely handling of a good book. The "movie" has made us restless, until we forsake the reading of "Treasure Island" for the seeing of it. And the school—even though some excellent efforts have been made by school libraries—is more a negative factor than a positive one in inculcating the desire on the part of young folk to read without profit other than that which comes to the soul.

The home until recently has depended on the library for its books. How many homes have you been in, and seen no books on the center-table? Money is ill-spent to such, unless a cheap edition can be bought. And, while it is true that a good story will be a good story even if it cost the purchaser only 25 cents, a better edition, with good print, on fine paper, with wide margins and striking illustrations, is somehow elevating to the artistic instincts, dormant in every one of us. Children's Book Week is a direct challenge to such indifferent attitude toward books.

Does the Children's Book Week merely sound the tocsin of "classic" books? Does it set out to preach that the Boy Scout should read nothing but Plutarch or Bunyan, and revel only in Scott? Does it declare that those books alone are accounted great which have been written in the past, and that no new book is worthy of being bought for the young? Not at all. As one librarian has pointed out—and she was making a plea for the bookseller with the "latest" for sale—not all the good pictures have been drawn by Caldecott and Kate Greenaway; not all the good school stories have been concentrated in "Tom Brown at Rugby." There are other tales of adventure as fine—if not written as finely—as Stevenson's "Treasure Island."

It seems to me that this well-planned campaign for the owning of good books, for the reading of good books, is an effort not alone to make the young realize the value of a story as "a sure friend," but to create in them a real taste for the fine edition.

Perhaps the most effective results hoped for from this campaign of the Children's Book Week are the various methods of keeping alive the subject of books as things in our daily existence to be loved, to be selected with care and not with department-store hazard. In every direction, during the period between Nov. 13 and 19, the Child's Book becomes a national hero. It is discussed by parents in their clubs or in their own private parlors; it is lauded in libraries, at Boy Scout meetings; in churches and in local newspapers. Book stores have window displays which make the children gaze into the windows as though a book were some toothsome dish. Such education should end in a clearer comprehension of what is being written for children today, what has been written in the past, and what children themselves really like.

There are books of information which are superseded later on by books of more up-to-date matters—



"Picturizations of Such Child Classics as 'Treasure Island.'"

science advances—and there is no more fastidious reader than the boy expert, whether he be reading on wireless, submarines, or football. There are books of "timely" character, which are fleeting as to intrinsic literary worth, but which serve their purpose in keeping the young reader abreast of the times. The libraries are zealous in their efforts to give far publicity to such volumes, and their advice to their juvenile constituents is safe and trustworthy. The bookseller is just as eager to inculcate the habit of good reading among the young as is the librarian, because he knows that the publisher would rather issue the book of good quality, which has a sale through several years, than an inferior book which passes with its novelty. In other words, the atmosphere is clearing for a sounder understanding of the subject of children's literature—and Children's Book Week has, in its short existence, been a powerful fumigating influence.

MONTROSE J. MOSES.

PICTURES INCREASE READING

The reading habit gives every sign of having increased since the pictures began. Possibly nothing may rival the screen in presenting the mechanism of a story, but I don't think telling a story can ever go out of fashion, for words have a magic of their own. It may be significant that nine-tenths of the demonstrations in a movie audience are for the flashed words. The pictures may have prepared the way, but the words precipitate the emotion. Aside from any such consideration, I think we may take it for granted that the influence of picture shows will not lessen but increase the imaginative interest in books. We see a story on

the screen. We inhabit it in a book. The stories that stay with us, that influence us deeply and permanently, are the stories stamped upon the mind by the wizardry of words. Thus I think every parent or well-wisher of children should see to it that they have books—good books; books they may live with as with the companions that are most intimate of all. Moreover, the children who like the screen because it is real will always like books because they are not real, but out of the enchanted places. Don't forget that. Afterward to put the enchantment on the screen is a confession that the book story is not merely a source in the structural sense, but a source commanding eternally the imaginations and affections of the world.

ALEXANDER BLACK.

PICTURES KILL READING

The movie is moving the boy away from good literature. He is getting his fictional entertainment in bald, elementary action pictures. Once he develops the movie type of mind he will be lost to good books forever. The repose and repression, the atmosphere and background that are part of all good books, will bore him. His artistic perceptions and appreciations will become of the five-and-ten-cent-store kind, a counterfeit of the real thing.

In moving pictures the boy finds nothing that calls for the exercise of his mind. Everything is stereotyped and commonplace—reduced, as it were, to the A B C of entertainment. The villain falls into a stock mold. So does the hero. Humor is not unfolded by deft touches, but usually by the grotesqueness of the comedy characters. And so the boy comes, in time, to expect his fictional characters to match up with the ex-

hausted types he has met on the screen. Originality of design and of expression antagonize him, for they demand that he leave his comfortably, lazy groove and turn his back upon the obvious. He becomes, in a sense, mentally sterile, the father of the mentally sterile man.

The movie story is chloroform for the boy. It lulls instead of stimulating. It says to him in effect: "Don't think; it isn't necessary; the pictures tell the whole story; why exert yourself to be amused?" And so comes the movie type of mind—a mind that has grown too torpid and too self-indulgent to stir itself.

Let us say that about this time the boy hears of the wonders of "Ivanhoe." Some chum tells him that there is fighting in it, siege and heroism, the clash of swords and the spice of rivalry. That sounds good, so he gets the book from the library. But it proves a bitter disappointment. The fighting, the heroism, the clash of swords are all there, but he has not the patience to find them. He has no appreciation of the beauties of style—he found none of that in the movies. He has no palate for background and atmosphere. The moving power of language leaves him cold. "Ivanhoe," like every other great book, demands something from him, and he is not equipped to give it. He cannot supply the reader-cooperation that the book demands. The movies simply asked for his eyes, never for his intelligence. And so he passes, in time, completely away from the field of books. He likes his meat red and raw and dripping. Real art isn't served that way. I would rather that my own boys learn to love one good book than to grow enraptured of a dozen movie hero-men. The book will stay with them; the movies might irreparably take something from them.

WILLIAM HEYLIGER.